



NEGOTIATING WITH IRAN: OBSTACLES AND OUTCOMES

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WELCOME/MODERATOR:

Jessica Tuchman Mathews

President

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

SPEAKERS:

James M. Acton

Senior Associate, Nuclear Policy Program

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Shahram Chubin

Nonresident Senior Associate, Nuclear Policy Program

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Transcript by Way With Words

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JESSICA MATHEWS: Welcome, everybody, to Carnegie Europe, for what, I think, is going to be a fascinating and important discussion about a most serious, certainly, one of the handful of the most serious crises that face us in the world today. I'm Jessica Mathews, President of the Endowment. It's a great pleasure to be here in this wonderful office. I don't know exactly what this signifies, but we have two wonderful speakers this afternoon; James Acton, who is a senior associate in the Carnegie Washington office. A nuclear physicist by training, James specialises in issues of relating to nuclear policy, deterrents, disarmament. He's just written an important book on how you get to actually achieving low numbers. What would have to happen if you were to attempt to get to major cuts in global levels of nuclear weapons. He chairs the Next Generation Working Group on US Russian arms control. And is the joint member from the United Kingdom of the International Panel on Fissile Materials. Shahram Chubin, on my right, is a non-residency new associate in Carnegie in their nuclear policy programme also.

His work focuses on non-proliferation, on terrorism and a whole range of Middle East policy issues. He was, for many years, the Director of Studies at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. And among his work, is a very important book entitled Iran's Nuclear Ambitions. He's been a consultant to the Department of Defence to the United Nations and to other important entities in the security field. We also have with us in the audience the former Deputy Director General of the IAEA, Pierre Goldschmidt, who is a non-residency new associate at Carnegie. In his time at the IAEA, Pierre, for his sins, had responsibility for the Iran portfolio for many, many years, and so can serve as an additional source of wisdom and knowledge and experience in negotiating with Tehran. So, Shahram is going to begin with some critical, historical context about how the Iranians think and what is shaping their thinking in this growing crisis. Then we'll turn to James to talk about how we might get out of it. And then we'll have plenty of time for discussion.

Just as a way to begin, I realised the other day that it's almost exactly ten years since President Bush coined the phrase; 'axis of evil'. It was ten years ago last week, and, of course, put in it Iraq, North Korea and Iran. We know, and I won't go into all that's happened in the intervening ten years to Iraq and North Korea, but a great deal has happened to Iran that's worth remembering, I think. First of all, it lost its two most detested enemies - the Taliban, in Kabul and Saddam Hussein, in Baghdad. It has made an enormous amount of progress in its nuclear programme, though one has to say that the six month to two year horizon to getting to weapons capability seems, sometimes, to be an infinitely receding one; it's always six months to two years down the road. But for all that positive empowerment of Iran, one would have to say, I think, that Tehran as never been as isolated as it is today.

The Arab Spring has completely destroyed its narrative of change in the Middle East. And its role as intellectual leader for those feeling angry, oppressed and ignored in the region, has simply been completely undermined. It is about to lose its most important ally, indeed, perhaps it's remaining ally, in Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. Simply the announcement of impending further sanctions has caused a 70% decline in a matter of weeks in the Iranian Real [inaudible], forcing the country to turn to an all-cash economy in which bags of cash have to be shipped over every night from Dubai, creating, thereby, an enormous bulge in corruption in the country.

There has been, partly as a result of Iran's own behaviour and partly as a result of a government in Washington that has created a completely different environment in the world, there has been a real shift in international public opinion about whether this conflict is about Iran's valid legitimate rights under the NPT or whether it is about a threat to global peace. And there has been, I would say, an evolution in the IAEA in both its strength and determination to deal with this issue and its growing conviction about

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where the truth may lie. So that's a very quick ten year overlook on this and no I turn to our experts. I would like to say one other thing that goes directly, I think, to the core of this. It's a technical set of issues, but it's a political crisis, and its solution will be heavily political. So understanding that aspect, the domestic politics in Tehran and the historical context that shapes their thinking, is a place to begin and is where we will begin with Dr Chubin.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Thank you very much, Jessica. I hope you won't fall asleep if I give you a little bit of historical background. It's very easy to forget, with so many things happening globally, the particular impact of particular events on countries and how that changes the way they look. The Iran-Iraq war was the first war Iran had had for a couple of centuries. And it was a long war. A bloody war. Very costly and inconclusive. And it radicalised the regime. Many people say that if the war had not occurred a few months after the revolution, the regime might have turned out a little bit different. As it was, it fought an eight year war to a standstill. And during the course of the war, the regime invented a strategic culture, what somebody has called the strategic culture of Assura, a sort of Shi'ite strategic culture that puts the emphasis on martyrdom, commitment and morale over strategic doctrine or weapons technology.

The experience of the war itself, one, Iran was unprepared; it was a surprise. It wasn't ready; the military were in disarray. There was a technical surprise, chemical weapons were used against it, as were missiles; Iran had neither with which to retaliate. Iran was sanctioned and embargoed by the United States in 1984, so it had to scramble to get spare parts for its American and British equipment. Iran was dependent on outside suppliers because it hadn't any arms industry itself. And it watched the United Nations Security Council acting passively. First, there was never any resolution against the aggressor. It was always difficult to define the aggressor and we all understand that. But, still, I'm talking from the Iranian point of view.

Secondly, there was no condemnation of Iraq's use of chemical weapons. The reality of the war was that Iran was isolated, except for Syria, in the entire Arab world, with a marginal exception of Libya. It was punished and the war was inconclusive, and, therefore, a failure. It was a failure because the Iranian regime, Khomeini, insisted the war was not between states and it wasn't about territory; it was between Islam and hypocrisy. And the question is that if a war goes on for eight years and it ends inconclusively, then either it wasn't about Islam or it was badly prosecuted, so there was a slight problem with the ending of the war since the stake had been defined in such large terms.

After the war, the war was, as it were, re-imagined. In fact, the narrative of the war was re-imagined from the day the ceasefire was written. And up until today, we still have people, generals, ministers and others, writing their memoirs about the war and trying to tell us how they fought the war, what the mistakes were, and how other people positioned themselves. In a sense, it's a continuing issue in domestic politics. Shortly after the ending of the war, hardliners would say to women who were walking without the hijab the martyrs haven't died for you to walk without a hijab. So there was all this selective interpretation, if you like, of the war. But the war was re-imagined as an imposed war; it was not a war that Iran provoked, but one that the west gave Saddam a green light for. That it was a glorious epic of sacred defence, and, as I said it was about Islam against sinners. And this myth, this glorious chapter of the war, that it was a collective effort of self-sacrifice and unity is, in fact, very much opposed to the reality where there were divisions within the country and differences on prosecuting the war and continuing the war.

I mentioned the invention of a strategic culture, you still have it today; they talk about resistance and steadfastness and the culture of martyrdom and the importance of self-reliance. Let me view on from that to Iran's view of arms control and the MPT in relation to that. Now, the MPT, as you know, created two classes of states at least. It ignored a third class. Basically, nuclear weapon states or non-nuclear

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weapon states, in itself, very much against the Iranian view of international politics where all states should be treated equally. So to start with, the MPT was discriminatory. Secondly, of course, arms control was selectively applied because while people had been asking the non-nuclear weapon states to continue and intensify their non-nuclear weapon status by adding additional responsibilities, countries like India, for example, who never signed the treaty, are getting special arrangements with the United States. So from the Iranian point of view, not only was the MPT flawed from the beginning, but, since then, it's been selectively applied. The United Nations Security Council as a political tool, I mentioned that in the Iran-Iraq war. The Iranians see the IAEA as being manipulated by the United Nations Security Council, i.e., the United States. The IAEA inspectors are western spies in the Iranian view. After all, the UNSCOM and UNMOVIC inspectors turned out to be western spies, some of them. They even wrote their memoirs about it.

What about enrichment. Well, I haven't emphasised the point about conventional arms. In the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's arms were largely American and English. They were cut off and Iran had to scramble for spare parts and went to Israel in the early period and also to other countries; South Korea, Vietnam and others to get parts for its F5s and F4s. And it had to cannibalise. This feeling of being dependent on external suppliers is a very, very strong legacy of the Iran-Iraq war. Never again are we going to be embargoed but being dependent on outside suppliers. So when somebody comes along, as my friend, Pierre Goldschmidt does at the IAEA or through there and says why are you enriching? We can supply you with enrichment from outside. They say oh, forget about it. We will do our own enrichment. We're not getting dependent on foreign suppliers. It's a very clear line, at least in theory, there's a clear line between that and their view that... forget about the economics of enrichment; that they'll take a dozen reactors before it becomes economic. We want to be responsible for our own enrichment. We're not going to resume dependency and, hence, vulnerability by having enrichment supplied by Russia or anyone else after Boucher.

Confidence building? Well, in the Iranian view, confidence building; who, in fact, needs reassuring? The international community says they want to be reassured, Iran thinks it is the victim, and it feels it needs to be reassured, after all, it was embargoed. After all, there were sanctions on its nuclear programme, even before Natanz was discovered in 2002, the United States had sanctions on the Iranian programme. So they think they're the victim and they need reassurance.

Compromise? Well, compromise between good and evil is not possible, right? You're either right or wrong, you don't meet half way, otherwise you're wrong. So it's a sign of weakness as well. And also, in the Iranian view, compromise is the beginning of the slippery slope to regime extinction. This is the way they define it and, of course, it's a self-perpetuating, self-fulfilling prophecy that you can't negotiate because if you negotiate, you'll be entrapped and the demands will multiply and accelerate and you'll find yourself without a revolutionary regime.

Diplomacy? Well, the Iranian view of diplomacy is, basically, as we can see, to deflect, divide, delay and divert. Divide allies, divert attention, delay sanctions. Meanwhile, creating *fait accompli* for a bargaining chance. And the vocabulary in the nuclear negotiations is all about resistance and steadfastness, very much the vocabulary of the war, which was about holding out, one more offensive, resisting outside pressure, steadfastness. The nuclear issue has been used very much as a national issue in Iran, just as the Iraqi war was used as a national issue by the regime, calling for sacrifice and unity, and also the promise of a step to becoming a great power.

Now, let me move to current events a little bit. It seems to me that from the western view, Iran is paying a very high price for insisting on enrichment. Enrichment which it, clearly, doesn't need, it doesn't need now, and won't need for a decade at least. Enrichment which will never be economic. So why insist on it

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now? Why incur sanctions and costs needlessly and pointlessly? The only explanation from a western view is that there's a weapons intent or, at least, a threshold capability intent. The Iranian failure to notify Natanz, for example, was either a strict or an incorrect interpretation of its responsibilities in terms of advanced notification. And it plays constantly cat and mouse with the inspectors as to what can be shown and what can't be shown and what they can see and what they can't see. And, at the same time, Iran has continued with a parallel build-up of its delivery systems and with the manipulation of ambiguity of what its intent is when Iranian leadership talks about becoming a nuclear power sometimes means in enrichment terms, but the ambiguity is deliberate. And all this is often, with the frequent military exercises and missile tests, is often seen as a sign of its bellicosity and its weapons intent.

There is, of course, another interpretation. The Iranians, I think, see things this way; the west really has not stomach for war. The missile tests and the military exercises are really a way to cover the conventional weakness of the country and a way of signalling their preparedness as a form of deterrent. Their ambiguity is also intended as a means of deterrent. Ambiguity as to what they have and ambiguity often about what they would do, except that it would be very big. Enrichment has caught international attention which Iran can use to increase and amplify its voice. And Israel, of course, serves as a convenient excuse, a pretext for its arms programmes, and, especially, its missile programmes. The nuclear issue, in any case, domestically, is a galvanising national issue which keeps the regime afloat, in its view. And it's also an important tool for legitimating the regime, given its absence of performance, legitimacy in any other respect and given the fact that any other form of legitimacy has been steadily eroded by the narrowing electoral base of the regime. And, in this view, a limited attack would strengthen the revolution. I don't think, and I'm concluding here because I think you want to get on, two points. I don't think that Iran has a clear end state in mind. I don't think they're playing a deep strategic game. The pace, direction and the end state will all depend on events and what the traffic will bear. Inshallah, the Islamic republic will emerge stronger, but it won't necessarily happen.

I think I would conclude about the Iran-Iraq war, and I had to summarise it very quickly, that the continuation of that vocabulary and the continuing harking back to that glorious chapter, which was really an inglorious chapter and a very bloody one, shows that Iran is really a very deeply traumatised country and the regime is a deeply traumatised one. And, in some senses, the regime is, in fact, not so much shunning negotiations as negotiating all the time, but simply not in the way that's understood in the west.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Thank you. I just have to add a personal note; about six years ago, I spent several years in a Track 2 negotiation with Iranians on this issue, and two of the members of the Iranian team had been gassed in the war. And both of them suffered visibly as a result and it was a constant reminder, and a very, very present one, in the room all the time; you saw the physical consequences of a gas attack. James.

JAMES ACTON: Thank you, Jessica. Jessica mentioned that this is almost a ten year anniversary of the axis of evil speech. Coincidentally, it's also coming up for another ten year anniversary which is the ten year anniversary of the Iranian nuclear crisis beginning. It was in August 2002 that Natanz was publicly revealed for the first time. All the evidence suggests is it had been known about privately by intelligence agencies for at least some time before that. And so ten years later, I think we are now closer than ever to one of two pretty appalling end states to this crisis. One possibility is that Iran gets the bomb. The other possibility is of military action by Israel or by the United States and Israel together. Those two outcomes are, of course, not mutually exclusive; military action does not necessarily preclude Iran from getting the bomb, which seems to be one of the strongest arguments against it.

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I had assumed until a few weeks ago that Israeli talk of military action was, essentially, bluff. I was inclined to believe that if the Israelis were talking about it, it meant that they weren't about to do it and it was a mechanism for getting western and Arab states to put more pressure on Iran. I changed my mind when it was pointed out to me that, actually, the Israel government did not want this debate to be happening in public. It was forced out in public by Mir [inaudible], Degan [inaudible] and others and so this public debate that we're seeing was never intended to be public.

If there is a way out of this crisis, then at least part of it must be, I believe, presenting Iran with a credible solution, a credible end state to the nuclear issue. This solution will have to involve confidence building broader than the nuclear issue and the E3 offer from June 2008 looks at that part. But it can't be purely outside of the nuclear issue; clearly, an agreement on the nuclear issue has to be reached. This, indeed, was intrinsic in the twin track approach that the Obama administration, and, actually, for four years before it, the second term of the Bush administration, effectively was taken and that was to sharpen the choice. To use sanctions to put pressure on Iran to try and force it to negotiate. But this raises the question; what are you actually going to do if Iran decides to sit down and negotiate in good faith? What kind of solution, what settlement are you going to offer it on the nuclear issue? To be very clear, the existence of an offer on the table of a compromise on the nuclear issue, clearly does not guarantee success. But, conversely, I think it is true that the failure to have such an offer, the failure to put a compromise to the nuclear issue on the table, pretty much guarantees failure.

What I want to discuss today is what such a solution over the nuclear issue might look like. To start analysing a very broad general level and, deep down, a bit into the technical details. It seems to me that a solution to the nuclear issue has to involve at least four separate components. Firstly, a clear definition of what activities Iran can conduct and what activities Iran can't conduct. Personally, I think the demand for a suspension of enrichment, at this point, has become something self-defeating, but this is an issue over which we can differ. The point that I make is that there has to be a definition of what's allowed and what's not allowed and it has to be sufficiently clear and robust.

Second, I think there has to be a commitment on the part of Iran to answering the questions from the International Atomic Energy Agency about its past nuclear activities. This will probably involve Iran acknowledging that it has a nuclear weapons programme. So the only way I can see this happening is if there is a clear commitment, probably delivered both publicly and privately to Iran. That if it acknowledges it's had a nuclear weapons programme, cooperate fully and proactively with the IAEA to explain the extent of that programme, and, subsequently, dismantles it, that there will be no punishment for doing so. I think for all the reasons that Sharon has indicated, credibly convincing Iran that there will be no punishment for acknowledging the existence of a nuclear weapons programme will be a challenge. But I cannot see how it's possible to build confidence without acknowledgement about past nuclear activities.

The third challenge is the easy one of the four; that is verifying Iran's declared nuclear activities. The plants of which Iran has acknowledged the existence of, ensuring that they are being operated in the way that Iran has declared. The agency is doing this already, you might want marginal improvements on IAEA safeguards here and there, but that third bit is, clearly, the easy bit. And, fourthly, you're also going to want to know that nuclear activities are only taking place at declared sites. That is to say that there is no nuclear activity at undeclared sites.

That's the challenge that I'm going to concentrate on today and I want to convince you, first of all, that this challenge is very hard and very strongly prone to being politicised. With the result that this is not going to be something that could be sorted out at the last minute in technical talks. At a theoretical level, this challenge is hard because centrifuges, Iran's preferred enrichment technology have very... the

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indicators or centrifuge activity are, potentially, very modest. The electricity requirements are small. The size of a militarily significant centrifuge facility is small. The emissions, the radioactive materials that leak out of centrifuges are in exceptionally small quantities and can only be detected fairly close to the site. And when I say fairly close, I'm talking about a few kilometres at most away from a well-run site. So looking for secret centrifuge activity is hard.

There are two mistakes that you can make in arms control inspections. You can think a country is complying when, in fact, it is not. Or you can be convinced that a country is cheating, when, in fact, it's complying. And either of these mistakes would be very problematic to make in the Iranian context. And if you look over the history of the last 20 years of arms control, not just in nuclear but also in chemical weapons, there are at least, I think, three examples that spring to my mind of where we got it wrong. The first one was in Libya; you'll remember that during the Bush administration, in December 2003, Libya announced it was giving up all its weapons of mass destruction programme. It was welcome back into the international community. The Bush administration claimed this is a very significant success for its foreign policy, the fact that Libya had been disarmed of its nuclear and had committed to disarm its chemical weapons. What we found out recently was that Libya hadn't declared all of its chemical weapon stockpiles. There were not large, but significant quantities of chemical weapons left in Libya that, as far as I can work out, significantly surprised the intelligence community that they were there. That's an example of thinking a country was complying and it turning out not to.

Twice during the Clinton administration, to enormous embarrassment and very significant cost, the administration thought it had evidence of illicit activities. In 1993, it detained a ship, and if anybody hear speaks Chinese, I apologise in advance for my pronunciation, it's called something like the Yinhe, which the Bush administration believed was carrying chemical weapons to Iran. This was stopped on the high seas by the United States in a stand-off lasting a number of months before it was eventually inspected by Saudi Arabia and nothing was discovered in there. Six years later, in fact, it started earlier than six years later, the United States became convinced that there was nuclear activity in North Korea in Kumchang-ni. Eventually, after a prolonged series of negotiations, the United States gave North Korea a \$177 million in food aid to be allowed to inspect what turned out to be an empty cave. There may very well have been nuclear activities planned for that cave; there were not when the inspectors got there.

So this is a very technically difficult problem, being certain that there's not illegal activity at an undeclared site. And I think any solution is going to be prone to being debated extensively. I think members of the P5 plus 1, Israel and, potentially, the Arab states may all have different opinions about what is sufficiently adequate. Each of those states will, presumably, have significant internal divisions about what kind of verification would be adequate. And I think it's entirely possible that if Iran comes to the table to negotiate in good faith, a solution could be stymied by these very intense disagreements both domestically and between states within the relevant... not just the negotiating parties, the five permanent members of the security council plus Germany, but also the other states with a very strong interest in the outcome.

To end on a slightly more technical note, let me inject some ideas. Firstly, my colleague, Pierre Goldschmidt, who's already been flagged up a couple of times, has developed what he terms the temporary complimentary protocol which, not to get too technically into this, will provide the agency with very significant enhanced access to information and people, amongst other things. And what I would want to see from Iran is an explicit acknowledgement that it will tell the IAEA its supply network for centrifuge components. Both components that are manufactured domestically and components that are imported from abroad. That is very useful because if you know where Iran is getting centrifuge components from and you shut down that network to the extent it is external, it very significantly raises

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the cost of building a new supply network. And if you do detect components coming in, then you have evidence of agreement violation.

Secondly, and this was an idea that I first raised five or six years ago now, which is I think it's necessary, or it would be very useful, let me put it that way, to mark centrifuge components where they are produced in Iran, tagging is the technical terminology here, so that one could be certain that all of the components that were turning up in declared sites, came from these declared centrifuge workshops. And, more importantly, so that you knew that all of the components produced in these centrifuge workshops had arrived at the site and hadn't been diverted elsewhere.

Thirdly, I think it would be very helpful if Iran gave the IAEA permission to take environmental swipe samples, which can be used to detect the presence of radioactive and other materials, without prior notice at any site that is accessible publicly in Iran. So anywhere the Iranian public can go, the IAEA can go without advance permission, to take environmental swipe samples. And that would be very useful because if the IAEA got an intelligence tip-off that there was a centrifuge facility, or, indeed, another type of nuclear facility at some private place, if the IAEA could get within a few kilometres of that site in a public place to take a swipe sample, it could do so very quickly and usefully.

Fourthly, one of Iran's arguments has always been the sites you want to look at are military sites where conventional military activities take place. And, indeed, it's been reported that one of these sites that the IAEA wanted to inspect at Pacha it was recently denied permission to inspect. If there is undeclared activity then Iran is likely to argue that these are conventional military sites. The IAEA has always responded by saying two things. Firstly, under the terms of the safeguard agreement, we're allowed to inspect conventional military sites. And, secondly, we're willing to develop protocols by which managed access could be facilitated, so access by which the IAEA could learn what it wants without compromising secret Iranian information. I think it would be very valuable to develop those, manage protocols in advance, developing them at the heat of the moment is likely to be very time consuming; it gives Iran a very good excuse to delay. I think it would be very useful to have these managed access protocols in advance.

The Chemical Weapons Convention has a very detailed manage access protocol which certainly could not be used as is because nuclear is different from chemical; you need different kinds of access. But it's an example of where a detailed manage access protocol has been developed.

Any agreement with Iran is going to have to be negotiated and the west is not going to get everything it wants. But to the extent that there are significant differences between the P5 plus 1 between Israel and the Arab states internally about what's necessary for effective verification, that will make the negotiations much harder. And right now, unfortunately, I don't see very much creative thinking, at least in Washington, about what such a negotiated solution might look like. And that, to my mind, is something that has to be done in advance of negotiations.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Before I open it up for general discussion, I want to ask Shahram to say a word about whom we are negotiating with or might be in Tehran. In other words, who are the nuclear decision makers?

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: I think that's a good question and a lot of the intelligence people in Europe and the United States have been trying to identify them, if only to put them under sanctions. And other countries have tried to identify them for other reasons. But my guess is that it's becoming harder since the revolutionary guards seem to have a foot in the Atomic Energy Organisation and since the current head of

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the Atomic Energy Organisation is also a revolutionary guard, to distinguish between whether these people are primarily revolutionary guards or, primarily, physicists or technicians independent of that.

The other point I would make simply is that there's an interesting article about a year ago on survival by somebody whom I didn't know who made me think of this and he made some reference to it, which is on a technical issue like nuclear, which has so many dimensions. It has the economic dimension, it has the manpower dimension within Iran, the technology dimension, but it also a diplomatic dimension, obviously, and the treaty obligations, as well as the military security aspect, the supreme leader is, in fact, the final decision maker who sets the tone for decisions. And how issues are framed to him and reported to him, the last person who does that, basically, can get the sort of answer that he wants. It seems to me that we know that decision making in Iran is opaque, we know it's personal and we know it's informal. That is to say, there is not a meeting, let's say, if diplomats, technicians, university people, security people, thrashing the thing out, the way you do in the west, perhaps, in a national security council or in some other multi-disciplinary meeting. With, then, recommendations going up to the supreme leader. It doesn't happen that way in Iran. So I think the decision making is very, very problematic in the Arabic context.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I would take it maybe one step further that when this subject is on the table, and Modena Judd is not in the room, but not withstanding his inflammatory rhetoric, he is largely irrelevant to the key decision making on this issue.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: I would think he is one player among many and if he's not in good order with the supreme leader, presumably, the supreme leader isn't going to be passing on any information that he gets from other sources. I think everybody is playing to the supreme leader. They're not working through their institutional channels. If they have access to him, they're trying to ingratiate themselves with him. The current foreign minister, for example, is technically competent and is western educated and one had heard that he is a more reasonable person, but he's not foreign minister and he reports to the supreme leader. I think it's a group thing. Political prospects won't be enhanced by saying wait a second, have you thought about this? The mood is set by the supreme leader and I think people are probably competing, trying to reach the same level of animosity to the west that he has.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Would you agree also with Karim Sajjad for his view that this is a man, the supreme leader, who believes firmly that compromise is a step down the slippery slope towards weakness and that the last thing you ever want to do is compromise under pressure.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Absolutely, yes. I think it's not even under pressure. The last thing you want to do is compromise, full stop. If you're ever going to compromise, it's probably going to be under extreme pressure, but their view is that it's not... the issue being discussed is only symbolic of a broader issue. We all know you want to get rid of the Islamic republic. We all know you've wanted to do it for years. The nuclear issue's a pretext; that's their view. And then tactical things within the nuclear is just a pretext within a pretext.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I think what you've heard is some idea of the degree of difficulty of this issue on both the technical front and the political front. And, yet, we are looking at a potential outcome that, at least in my view, would be catastrophic. So let's open the discussion. There's already a hand back there. Will you just introduce yourself?

DANIEL KEOHANE: Daniel Keohane, Head of Strategic affairs at FRIDE here in Brussels. Just a simple question, and thank you both for very interesting presentations. It's clearly a very complex issue and there is clearly a lot of negotiation to be done. But I'm just wondering, given that we're in Brussels,

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where do the EU sanctions fit into this? How does that affect the debate in Tehran or in Iran generally? How does it feed into the domestic debate? Also maybe bearing in mind the green movement and all of that, how does that all fit in? Does it help at all?

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: My guess is that the sanctions have come as a surprise to the Iranians. The Europeans have always been divided, always have different views. You have an economic crisis in Europe and in the United States, and a global one, the Iranians didn't think that this would happen. And it's taken a long time, but the three leading countries in Europe have taken a very strong position, admittedly, they're not the ones directly affected by the oil; it's the others. But I think the Iranians are very surprised and it's just another nail I think.

JAMES ACTON: Let me add one thing briefly, which is I think the extent to which oil sanctions affect the Iranian regime financially, I think critically depends on what China does. China, it is true, is still buying Iranian oil, but China is also trying to bargain for a very much reduced price for Iranian oil. So, obviously, in an ideal world, the United States would quite like it if nobody agreed to buy Iranian oil. But China buying Iranian oil at a significantly discounted price is actually not a bad outcome for the US.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: India is also buying, I think, with half of it in rupees, so, in each case, the Iranians are getting less.

JAMES ACTON: Exactly the extent to which Arab states can and will make up the difference, the extent to which the market factors, the risk of military action to the price of oil, I think there's a lot of uncertainties. We don't know what's going to happen to the price of oil and also to Iranian revenues, but Chinese and Indian behaviour, who are two of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil, I think, suggests that oil sanctions are more likely to have an effect.

TOM SAUER: Tom Sauer, from the University of Antwerp in Belgium. The most important goal for the regime is survival. And how important are security guarantees by the west in possible grand bargain? Will the west be prepared to give such guarantees as the goal regime changes? And will Iran trust such a promise?

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: I agree with you that regime survival is the primary goal of the regime. The difficulty is convincing them that strategic coercion is a real prospect. They've been rather clever at simply escalating their counter reaction that is that the Iranian argument is that there's no such thing as a limited strike. A limited strike against us is a threat to the regime. We will act as if it's an existential threat. We will attack its enablers, the Gulf States, the bases, straight [unclear], Israel. And it won't just be in the theatre, it will be outside of the theatre; it will be worldwide. And not only that, the world will not be limited in time; we will decide when the war ends. Now, all of that is a fairly apocalyptic threat against a limited attack.

So, to be facetious, I think if you're going to go after Iran, you may as well make it a regime change proposition because they're going to treat it as a regime survival issue. but putting that aside, I'm being a little bit flippant, but you can see what I'm saying is that if you go for a limited attack and they treat it as a regime survival and respond in a major way, then you've really done something rather foolish. You've stirred the hornets' nest. So it's better to do it completely or not do it at all. The trouble is there have been periods when the west has a very real possibility of coercing the regime, in terms of its survival, to negotiate. The Iranians don't feel that now. They may down the road with the sanctions from Europe and with the new unity the international community is showing, and with the threats from Israel, they may feel the regime is in danger. Rafsanjani and others, Hartami [inaudible] an others, went to the

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supreme leader in 2003 and said look, they're in Iraq, we're next, let's deal. And that was the origins of the 2003 proposal. They were scared as hell and you could see it.

And in 2002, even before the Americans realised it, Resaii was already saying we're next and the Iranians were very shrewd about what was coming up. So security assurance is easier said than done to a regime that doesn't let you engage with them. but I agree, and I've always argued, and I still think I believe this, I wrote this in a book six years ago and in an article on foreign affairs last year, what you have to have in mind is not simply an inducement, the carrots, not just the stick but the carrots that Jim mentioned, I totally agree with that. but in a wider sense, you have to also ask; what is it they ask, what do we want and Pickering and Lewis wrote a piece similar to this a couple of days ago in an OPED piece, in a sense, you have to ask yourselves, before you get there; what is it we are prepared to offer them? What is it that we want from them? And then the sequence and the [unclear] can be worked out in negotiations. And, clearly, security guarantee is important, but I'm just wondering how you convince them that you're not after regime change when they think that everything is destined for regime change. It's just like the Soviet Union. They act in such a way as to create enemies around their periphery and then they say they're encircled. And they don't ask themselves how much their own behaviour is responsible for this. The Iranians have done exactly the same thing, I think, in terms of regime survival.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I think, however, it's fair to also add that the United States is in a uniquely bad position to have this discussion because it insisted before the Iraq war, at different times, that this was about weapons of mass destruction and not about regime change when it's absolutely clear from the record that it was about regime change. And that that was because we went to war before the inspections had had a chance to either succeed or fail. There's no other way to interpret what we did.

JAMES ACTON: Let me just add one thing very briefly. To answer the second part of your question, I think this administration genuinely doesn't seek regime change; it seeks behaviour change. The problem is that the nature of oil sanctions, which I think, on balance, are probably the right thing, if they work, it does threaten the existence of the regime. So, in practise, I think it's one of these situations where it's very hard. It's a bit like collateral damage from nuclear weapons, it's unavoidable. You can't separate the collateral damage from the actual effect. The nature of the sanction is the regime change is not clearly separable from the behaviour change. So I just can't conceive of how the United States could ever convince Iran, given the animosity, that it doesn't seek regime change, even if it genuinely doesn't.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Fabrice.

FABRICE POTHIER: Fabrice Pothier from NATO. I have two questions; brief ones. The first one, I think Jessica alluded to it at the beginning, what is the impact of the Arab Spring on the strategy calculus, for better or for worse, of the Iranian regime? Because you can actually make the case that in the light of Pickering's OPED that there might be an incentive for the Iranian regime to seek some kind of settlement because they are about to lose their number one ally in the region. So they might be in a position where it's now time to try to settle for negotiated status quo with the US and the other regional powers, rather than trying to keep on playing the spoiling power game.

The second question is we talked about sanctions and in a way, sanctions are the middle bit before that we are the fork in the road and there is one direction towards a negotiated settlement which would be tough. And there is another direction which is towards war, simply put. And it strikes me that in both cases, the west, which Shahram said was, on sanctions, pretty united now. It took time to get, for example, some European countries on board, that, in both cases, the west might be quite seriously divided, quite seriously fragmented. It's easy to imagine how, if there was a military intervention, but I think if there was a negotiated settlement with Iran, especially between the US and Iran, they will also be

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some issues with regards to the US allies and how they feel about that, and also about the Sunni powers in the region. So I would be interested... it's a bit of a prospective question, but I think we ought to look at that because the sanctions, as we all agree, are more of a way to get somewhere. We might not get there, but get somewhere else, but, in both cases, I think we might face some serious divisions.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I think James laid that out, that you would have divisions both within the key negotiating countries and among them as to what was significant confidence building measures that you had an agreement that could be adequately enforced. I don't know if there's more you want to add.

JAMES ACTON: Let me give you just one brief example. When the subject of the fuel swap came up, which was this Iran would give up some of its low enriched uranium in return for fuel for the Tehran research reactor. It took a long time to get consensus between France, the UK and the US on that proposal. Privately, the French thought it was an appalling idea and had to be talked round to it. There was a lot of scepticism and concern about what most people thought was a pretty sensible proposal, there were a lot of French diplomats and officials who were concerned that it was caving in. So even over something fairly modest like the TRR deal, the three states, not even including Israel and everybody else in that, there was disagreement between the three states. So I think there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that everybody will be, I think you're absolutely right, they wouldn't be unit of material or any kind of unit on what a negotiated settlement would look like.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Not just that, I think there would be a lot of differences if it came out that the United States was talking with Iran. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia would be most unhappy, not to mention Russia because if there was a strategic reversal, the Russian position is to keep the Iranians dependent on them and hostile to the west, basically. And then negotiate with the west about what would you give us if we are helpful with you on Iran.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Pierre, do you want to add something else?

PIERRE GOLDSCHMIDT: I was just going to say we should speak a little about China and Russia and their roles in trying to solve the issue. Of course, those two main veto wielding members of the Security Council have a different interest. For China, the worst thing would be war in the Middle East, because at the end, a barrel of oil would go above \$200 a barrel and that's against Chinese interest. To the contrary, it's very much in Russia's interests financially and also strategically because they will be the only one which would not have been involved in putting more sanctions. And to solve the issues, they would hope that their intervention would be necessary. So for the Russians, how to convince the Russians that this is not in their interest. The Chinese, I think, it's easy. I wonder whether you have any idea.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Can I respond to Fabrice's question about the Spring? Just very briefly, the Arab Spring or the Islamic awakening, as we called it in Tehran, which it isn't. Yes, I think Iran has been overtaken by it. I think it's completely marginalised by it. Nobody on any of the streets has talked about resistance and resistance access and rejectionism. They're talking about respect, dignity and some sort of democratic future with Islam, but a national Islam, not a pan Islam and not an Islamic Jihad; a local Islam. And each country will take its own form. Now, I think that and the fact that the sectarian cleavage is much more pronounced in the last year than was seen before. We've seen it in Yemen, but we've seen it particularly, obviously, in Syria, Iraq and in the Gulf, when the Saudis were willing to go in with the GCC and confront the Iranians in Bahrain, and the Iranians just did nothing; can't do anything to help their fellow Shi'ites. The sectarian issue is very strong. And now with Syria under siege, I'm not as optimistic and I hope it happens that this regime will go. I think it may be longer and bloodier.

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If it goes, and that's why the Iranians are investing so much in it, the Iranians will feel a little bit more besieged than they were before. You remember articles on the region three years ago about Iran and regional Gemini and ascendants which was nonsense because Iran's power was always parasitical of the problems of the region. The lack of the peace process, the frustration of various people in various countries. And if they take their destiny into their own hand, the Iranian model, which is already discredited at home, is going to be even more discredited on the Arab street. Whether the Iranians will feel so besieged as to negotiate or whether they will redouble their efforts as Khomeini suggested a couple of days ago in his speech, isn't clear, but it's certainly a change. And I think it's one of the reasons that the US and Russia have taken different positions on Syria. I don't think Syria, in a sense, it's a stake, but it's also a symbol of what might happen in the Middle East.

JESSICA MATHEWS: One has to also add that Iraq is lying there, basically, open to Iranian influence, troublemaking and could well be a substitute for Syria, although it isn't geopolitically quite as valuable in access to Hezbollah. There was a question back here.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I work at the Institute of Security Studies in Paris. I have two questions, in a sense, going back to several things that you mentioned before. First of all, obviously, there is an element of paranoia, both in Khomeini and the regime as such. But would you also agree that what happened in Libya intervention, in a sense, confirms the fact that if you allow anyone to verify that you don't have a weapons of mass destruction programme, opens you up for the kind of regime change that you're trying to avoid. Now, the other aspect of that, of course, is Iraq, to go back to what you were mentioning before. Isn't the problem today, and you mentioned several constructive possible partial solutions, is there anyone here, in the west today, in London or Paris, for that matter, or Washington, who has been thinking about whether they will be able or willing to take a yes for an answer? Is there any political will to actually then if you are in a negotiation settlement, to take a yes for an answer?

JESSICA MATHEWS: Let's posit that we're talking after the US election and after the French election and maybe also after the Russian election.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Lots of observers said, I'm thinking Laurie Freidman in 2003, after the invasion of Iraq, he said well, there we are. If you don't have weapons, you get invaded, North Korea has them, they don't get invaded. The Iranians made the same point about Libya. Basically, you can make it for them. First, you ask them to give up their revolutionary activity and declare their programmes cessation and then you unseat them anyhow. And that's exactly why the paranoia has some basis, at least in their mind. And taking yes for an answer, I think is exactly the formulation we were talking about earlier this afternoon. That's why I think that it's so important that the west gets its internal bureaucratic act together and then the inter-allied act together. Not that it's going to happen, but that is to say the Iranians are going to come up with a proposal. But you ought to know what it is you can live with. The notion that there would be no enrichment and that there will be no programme is clearly a non starter at any time in Iran. So there's going to be something and the question is there are types of things that Jim was saying about how you can reduce the anxiety or increase the reassurance that the facilities they do have are not misused and that you can sell that to your allies in your own bureaucracy is very important.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Can we say a word about, in this context, both the Turkish Brazilian deal fiasco and the Russian proposal that was put on the table?

JAMES ACTON: Let me say first of all, before I talk about Brazil and Russia. Fundamentally, the question of whether you can take yes for an answer is an American Israeli question. Everybody else is going to complicate the negotiating position, but the crucial issue is an American Israeli question. I find it unimaginable that the US could take yes for an answer before the election. And Israeli colleague has

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offered her scepticism to me about whether we have until the US election for military action. So it's dangerous to postulate what happens after the election. Of course, ironically, just like Begin going to Camp David, it's a republican president who could more easily take yes for an answer, but would be less inclined to. In terms of the Russian proposal, there is a so called Russian step-by-step proposal, they put a proposal on the table for alleviating the crisis in a step-by-step way. I have heard one report that I don't really trust about what's in that proposal. The devil is in the detail. The proposal is not public. If anybody here has read the proposal and would like to quietly tell me afterwards what's in it, then I would be extremely grateful. I think all I can say is that the devil is in the detail. If there are sufficient confidence building measures there, then it might be a good proposal to adopt. If it's a bit of a fob-off, then it's a bad proposal.

The Turkey and Brazil involvement, I think, is fascinating. This was after this agreement in October 2009 to swap this fuel, to supply fuel for the TRR that fell apart. Incidentally, because Ahmadinejad was attacked both from the right and from the left, domestically. Mir Hossein Mousavi who was very much the leader of the green movement and supported vocally by neo conservatives in the United States for promising to give away Iran's young nuclear scientists' fruit of their labours. So this gives you a flavour of how difficult the Iranian domestic politics are, not just the US domestic politics. After the deal fell apart, Brazil and Turkey then got involved and renegotiated the deal. My personal opinion is what they put on the table was just horrible. I wouldn't have accepted. I thought it had almost no-confidence building, value associated with it whatsoever. I think in the years to come, as different states' archives become declassified, in the he said/she said game between the US and Brazil about whose fault it was, we'll find out the answer to whether the Brazilians had misunderstood US recommendations for what the agreement should maintain, whether Brazil had just ignored those recommendations, whether such recommendations were given.

There is a wonderful diplomatic history to be written about whose fault this was. In my personal opinion, I suspect both sides, the US and Brazil, were acting in good faith and genuinely just got caught up in the middle, but we'll see.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Jan, you had a question.

JAN TECHAU: Yes, thank you. I have two quick ones on the domestic situation in Iran, the current pressure and the sanctions that we're building up. Is there any chance that they create some kind of political dynamic in Iran that could change the power equation from within, that could bring about some kind of movement of the political position they have because other forces gain traction?

Secondly, when we had an event on NATO last week in this very room, former US Ambassador to NATO, Bob Hunter said that in the current stand-off between the Americans, mostly, and Iran, the best thing we can hope for is that the Iranians are not losing control over their military forces, that command and control remains intact.

What he fears most is loss of control, some regional Iranian commander losing it and launching an attack, counter-attack, and then we're there. What do you think about these? Are they viable thoughts or is this just stuff?

JAMES ACTON: Where do you sit on that one, Shahram?

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: Very briefly, on the first one, I mentioned 2003 but when Ahmadinejad came in, and Mousavi and others had warned him that if they pushed the issue, it would go to the security council and there would be sanctions. If you look at the discussion in Iran, the elites were

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criticising Ahmadinejad as endangering the regime and this is an argument that Khamenei understands. You can't say that you don't like Ahmadinejad or the person who negotiates for him, but you can say that his behaviour and his comments on Israel are endangering the survival of the regime.

All of that criticism and debate stopped in December 2007 when the Americans produced their NIE. I won't go into the stupidity of American bureaucratic politics but clearly, this was an attempt to constrain the President from repeating Iraq, but going public on it meant that the next day, Ahmadinejad was parading around saying, I told you we haven't weaponised.

So basically, the threat was alleviated. If the regime felt in danger, that is, if the pressure on the streets became such that people started demonstrating, then those people who do not support this confrontational policy and want to reassure the international community would have some leeway to say, this is the result of policies Mr Ahmadinejad has been pursuing, instead of saying that Khamenei has been.

In other words, I think one of the arguments for sanction, all along, has been to increase the contradictions amongst the elite, and I think it will do that, if there's enough pressure on it.

As for the military, there's always been a rogue element in the military, in the Revolutionary Guards, because they tend to act pretty much on their own. In the Gulf, as you know, there have been cases where they've swarmed up to destroyers and there've been questions of interception of instructions and so on.

So it's not beyond the realm of possibility, if you have a military build-up in the Gulf, that somebody will either shoot or think the other side is about to shoot. We saw that with the Vincennes case and the Airbus, in a similar situation in 1987, was it, or 1988, when the Americans shot down a civil airliner in the Gulf through misreading the radar signature and thinking it was an aeroplane attacking them.

It's quite possible that would happen. The question then is, if you can't communicate with the other side, whether the escalation will increase. I don't know what to say about that, except that you might get into an unintended war, but then, in a sense, it's up to the Iranians to restrain their people.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

JACK FISCHER: Jack Fischer [inaudible], [unclear] Council of the European Union. After this very interesting debate – thank you for your contribution to that – I'm even more sceptical about the possibility of coming to a peaceful solution, I'm even more worried that we'll go into a confrontation.

We are almost in a mission impossible here. We in the West have been blamed for supporting regimes like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt. We should be on the side of freedom.

Here we have a regime which is dictatorial and we are supposed to give them guarantees for their survival? How are we going to explain that later to the Iranian people once they have got rid of the dictator? Just a question.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I think, for the reasons we talked about before, credible regime survival guarantees are basically impossible with this regime anyway, so we don't have to go there.

JACK FISCHER: Okay.

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JESSICA MATHEWS: There's just no way, given the history and the mindset of this man – and I think we have to be clear – this is not the person we're paying all the attention to, it's not Ahmadinejad. It's Khamenei, who lives a very different lifestyle, and what he knows about the world outside Iran and from whom he gets it, what he reads; he's a very cut-off individual.

So he and a group of maybe ten other people are making this decision. Ahmadinejad is pretty out of favour, to put it mildly. They can't afford to go to elections because of both the 2009 Green Movement and the Arab awakening. This is the last environment they want, but otherwise they'd be happy to be rid of him.

We're talking about a man who believes firmly, as we said earlier, that compromise is a way to lose power, for the ultimate power to disappear, and to lose the revolution. We were saying upstairs that the secret to this, the go/no-go to this crisis, alas, really does sit in Tehran.

Notwithstanding all the difficulties and challenges of reaching some kind of agreement about what might make an agreement acceptable, which is clearly a huge challenge for the West, the decision to defuse this thing, alas, probably does sit not where you'd like it to sit right now.

On the other hand, it's easy to spend time talking about how fiendishly difficult this is and forget how really bad a war would be. I think, for all of us who spend a lot of time on this issue, as one makes lists of how impossibly difficult the negotiated solution is, it's worth remembering to make the comparable list of the likely outcomes of a war.

Probably a worldwide recession; there are no Western economies which could withstand \$200-a-barrel oil for very long. Probably – unless you really did destroy this regime – you would entrench it for a generation. You would certainly convince Iran and a whole number of other countries that the only way to avoid attack, if you happen to be unpopular with the United States or the West, is to have a nuclear weapon.

You would almost certainly have decisions by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and maybe others to go nuclear. You can go on. This is not a pretty picture and, I think, all the positive, historic change that's going on in the region right now would be thrown into a cocked hat by a major Western or US invasion of Iran, even though it's not an Arab country.

So, as depressing and difficult as it is, we have to talk about it.

JACK FISCHER: It takes two to tango. Remember, it's also the Iranians [inaudible] too. Of course, we have to see both sides of it.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Yes. Well, I think the belligerent discussion – Shahram should talk about this – the threats about the Strait of Hormuz and the elbow-throwing us a reaction that the sanctions really hurt and they haven't even started yet, the tough ones.

When your currency loses 70% of its value practically overnight, that hurts. Do you want to add something?

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: I agree with you. I think we really are coming, after ten years, to a very decisive couple of years. I was in Israel last week for a conference – admittedly, one with a hard-line reputation – but from what I saw there, they're very serious about it. I often thought that the talking was a way to get another round of sanctions and convince the Russians, the Chinese and so on. I don't think so.

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After all, this comes after the Europeans have taken a strong position. I think they really feel... One of the questions that came up was precisely this point, in a roundabout way, about regime change. Some people have said, we'll never trust these people, there's no way you're going to have protocols of managed access or anything else that will convince us they're not doing something, so basically, it should be regime change.

Others argued – and I argued – that if the nuclear issue is your prime concern, to tie regime change to the nuclear issue may actually create a problem because the regime is not on its last legs. It's not about to fold, as far as I can see. It's going to intensify the repression and increase its support, increase its dependency on a smallish constituency – not small – that supports it.

So it's not about to go, short of an attack, I don't think. Therefore if you tie regime change to the nuclear issue, you may get no regime change and a nuclear problem.

The moral question that you raise about security assurances; I think that Jessica is right. Basically, you can say, we're not going to attack you out of the blue but we can't be responsible for what happens in the streets in Tehran. It's like Putin; how much does he believe this stuff and how much is it useful for ultra-nationalism, to say, we're embattled?

A lot of this stuff is self-inflicted and the regime wants to justify its measures to the people at home, with the Revolutionary Guards, the militia, the Basij, in terms of the revolution being embattled. How can you convince people who don't want to be convinced?

But some sort of security assurances should be thought up, which would be compatible with the interest in human rights and the evolution of the country, yes.

JESSICA MATHEWS: I think one also has to add, for anyone who's ever been in a negotiation, how affected you are by the process of the negotiation; you make judgements on the person on the other side of the table, they're influenced by what you say back and forth; things change over time.

In this case, we can't negotiate with the decision-maker. He's not going to be in the room, which makes it hard.

JAMES ACTON: Ultra-briefly, Iran may not be willing to tango; absolutely right, it may not be willing to do so, but if you don't have a credible negotiating position, you guarantee that this crisis will end in either Iran getting the bomb or military action, or both.

If you do have a credible negotiating position, it might have a better outcome. I would rather take the possibility of success than the guarantee of failure.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Yes, Tom.

TOM: I was going to ask James about timelines because the Israelis are on record as saying that June, when this last round of EU sanctions comes in, may be too late. What do they mean by that and do you believe that?

JAMES ACTON: Let me make three very brief points about the timeline, because it's a very important and complex issue. Firstly, if Iran decided to take the uranium it has already enriched and enrich it further, to

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90% or thereabouts – I can't remember the exact figure, off the top of my head, but you're looking at a number of months to produce efficient HEU for one or more bombs.

Secondly, there's a huge political element to that calculation; do you really only want to weaponise at the stage of having two bombs? I think it's the politics, it's Iran's political decisions rather than it's technical capability that set the timeline here. That's what makes it so uncertain.

Thirdly, I think there is a real question over how far Iran is through its weaponisation activities. When you have completed all the activities required to build a nuclear weapon, you can build that nuclear weapon in one night, which was what China did. China's first pick [inaudible] was manufactured in one night but it had done a whole load of activities in advance of that.

The Iraqis, for instance, started their weaponisation activities properly in 1988 and at the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, they were still maybe a year away from having completed them so I think there is huge uncertainty about long it will take Iran to weaponise.

So the answer is, I'm very concerned when I hear some analysts – particularly ones who used to work for the RAND corporation in the US – saying it could be done in 28.5 days and seven minutes, or whatever they say. I think there is huge uncertainty and it's primarily a politically-determined rather than a technically-determined timetable.

JESSICA MATHEWS: We should add that we haven't talked about assassinations or cyber attacks, both of which have been a very active part of this picture in the last period of time. The timeline is very much dependent on that and there's been a non-trivial degree of success from it.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN: The Israelis counter with the point of no return and zone of immunity [overtalking]...

JESSICA MATHEWS: Yes, and one has to say, to be fair, that this issue has been a very – we, the United States, used to carry on a great deal that Arab governments used the Israeli/Palestinian dispute as a way to deflect attention from their own problems. It's also true that the Israelis are using this issue as a way to deflect attention from the settlement programmes.

When they posit an existential threat, it has worked like a charm to deflect attention from that. If Obama is re-elected, they are looking at a President who doesn't have to face re-election or bow to political pressure from the American/Israeli community, who will – I think, in all likelihood – get back on that horse he mounted when he got elected the first time, and then leapt off when he got so much pressure.

JESSICA MATHEWS: One has to also say that the Israelis have been saying six months for six years or more, they really have posited these technical red lines.

We're at our closing time but if there are any last questions, we can take one or two. Other than that, I think everybody should have a drink as maybe a way to lighten this load a little. Meanwhile, I want to thank our two speakers, and Pierre Goldschmidt as well, for an extremely informative discussion. Thank you so much.